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SUBJECT: TWO MAJOR DARFUR FACTIONS STEP TOWARD UNION WHILE
FUR REMAIN IN THE COLD

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Summary

11. (SBU) JEM/Collective Leadership and SLA/Unity, two of the strongest rebel movements in Darfur, have taken steps toward a tentative alliance, and JEM/CL plans to conduct consultations with SLA/Unity leaders Abdullah Yehia, Suleiman Jamous, and Sharif Harir in Darfur over the next week to solidify this union. While insisting that their political and military strength entitles them to a commensurate role in peace negotiations, both JEM/CL and SLA/Unity have expressed a desire to coordinate with some of the less significant factions to broaden their ethnic base beyond the minority Zaghawa tribe. Coming after the conclusion of these consultations, hands-on UN/AU mediation with the movements would consolidate the gains thus far and lay the foundation for a resumption of peace talks. Incorporating the Fur into the political process, however, still presents a serious challenge and will require more consistent UN/AU leadership to execute a sophisticated strategy involving IDP representatives and Fur field commanders. End summary.

A Tentative Alliance

12. (SBU) The Justice and Equality Movement/Collective Leadership (JEM/CL) and the Sudan Liberation Army/Unity (SLA/Unity) have taken tentative steps towards a political and military alliance, which they hope will be consolidated after both movements' top leaders meet in Darfur within the next week, JEM/CL spokesman and political commissar Tadjedinne Niam and SLA/Unity commander Abdullah Yehia told Poloff in recent conversations. JEM/CL and SLA/Unity maintain the most potent fighting forces in the field, and while both groups' insist that their representation in peace negotiations be commensurate with their political and military strength, they support continued outreach efforts to the less significant rebel factions--many of whom are in Juba under the auspices of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). "Our goal is still to get one movement," said Yehia.

One Week of Field Consultations

13. (SBU) According to Niam, JEM/CL leaders will travel from Juba to Darfur around November 27 to consult with the elements in the field for approximately one week. The bulk of these discussions will focus on consolidating the union of JEM/CL and SLA/Unity, said Niam, who added that further consultations with the field-based elements of the National Movement for Reform and Development (NMRD), the United Revolutionary Forces Front (URFF) and SLA/Khamis Abdullah are also necessary. Yehia confirmed that he and his sometime rivals Suleiman Jamous and Sharif Harir--all of whom are in Darfur--welcome these consultations. Both leaders emphasized that no further progress can be made to prepare for talks until these discussions are complete, and Niam warned that rushing the preparatory phase without the input from the field could further splinter Darfur's fractious movements. Yehia delivered a similar message to UN Chief Mediator Taye Brooke Zerihoun and AU Chief Mediator Sam Ibok when they met with him in the field on November 22, according to UN Senior Political Advisor Muin Shrim. (Note: Taye and Ibok's meeting with Yehia was delayed from November 21 because the Sudanese Government denied the UN/AU flight clearance. Taye intends to raise this issue in Khartoum in the coming days. UN saw this as a new ratcheting up bureaucracy/control by the GOS nervous about events in Darfur. End note.)

Zaghawa Dominant but Crossing Ethnic Lines

14. (SBU) Of the two consolidated yet fragile groups that have emerged in Juba since mid-November, only JEM/CL carries significant military weight (reftel). Recognizing, however, that JEM/CL and SLA/Unity are predominantly Zaghawa, Niam said that he hopes their tentative alliance can expand to include Khamis Abdullah's Massalit-dominated SLA to broaden

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their ethnic base. Following their field consultation, Niam said that JEM/CL will return to Juba for additional discussions with the factions there to bring these more minor groups into the fold. (Note: Due to fissures within SLA/Unity, Yehia, Jamous, and Harir are unlikely to travel to Juba in order to maintain their hold over their field commanders. End note.)

Abdulshafie: The New Abdulwahid?

15. (SBU) The group in Juba that has coalesced around Ahmed Abdulshafie, a Fur, remains less open to coordination with JEM/CL and SLA/Unity and more opposed to current UN/AU plans for the peace process, according to Niam, Yehia, and UN/AU sources. Meeting with UN Chief Mediator Taye and AU Chief Mediator Ibok in Juba on November 19, Abdulshafie said that he would never attend peace talks in Libya and called for full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1706 before he would participate in negotiations.

16. (SBU) "He's become a smaller version of Abdulwahid Nur," Ibok told Poloff in a recent conversation, adding that Shafie would only accept an alliance with the other factions if he were selected as the group's leader, an unlikely scenario given his weak military and political position. Niam said that Abdulshafie continues to press for a declaration of unity without consultations in the field. (Comment: As Abdulwahid's continued refusal to participate in the peace process has increased his popularity among the Fur, particularly those in the IDP camps, Abdulshafie is likely seeking to demonstrate his own independent streak in order to gain support in the field. Meanwhile, the UN/AU suspect that the SPLM is giving tacit encouragement to Abdulshafie, their long-time ally, to demand the top leadership position in any consolidated rebel movement. End comment.)

¶7. (SBU) The UN and AU remain concerned that the SPLM is not coordinating its efforts with them and is using the movements now assembled in Juba as leverage against the National Congress Party (NCP). Ibok and Taye met with Government of Southern Sudan Vice President Riek Machar, now the SPLM's focal point for its Darfur initiative, on November 19. According to Ibok, Machar refused to provide the UN/AU with a specific strategy for the coming weeks, beyond aiming to entice Yehia to Juba.

¶8. (SBU) Machar also admitted that the SPLM had encouraged the Darfur movements to consider linking their struggle to the simmering tensions in Kordofan and that the SPLM had invited several "Janjaweed" to Juba to participate in the discussions, said Ibok (UNDSS told visiting USAID Administrator Fore on November 23 of several former janjaweed factions who may be switching sides, both in North and South Darfur). Ibok and Taye cautioned Machar against broadening the scope of the SPLM initiative to include Kordofan and the Arab tribes, noting that it would be detrimental to the overall political process as well as deepen the political crisis in the Government of National Unity (GNU) between the NCP and the SPLM. (Note: Subsequent to the UN/AU's November 19 meetings in Juba, the SPLM announced that First Vice President Salva Kiir will hold a closing ceremony for the Juba gathering on November 29. The UN/AU plan to airlift some of the movements' representatives to Darfur thereafter, according to UN Advisor Shrim. End note.)

Comment

¶9. (SBU) While no single leader is likely to emerge from among Darfur's rebel movements, a loose coalition of the relatively stronger rebel factions may be possible for the first time in several months. However, the absence of a pre-eminent leader means that such a fragile coalition will only be forged through consensus and will always operate based on a collective decision-making process, a fact that the UN/AU mediators would be well-advised to incorporate into their negotiating strategy. It is encouraging that JEM/CL

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and SLA/Unity appear to be courting other ethnic groups and lone military commanders such as Adam Bakheit--who, while now weak, could regain their footing and divide the movements again unless they are brought firmly into the fold. Coming after the consultations in Darfur, a UN/AU-sponsored meeting for the rebel movements in a neutral venue--with serious, hands-on UN/AU mediation--could capitalize on the gains thus far, defuse some of the growing concern about the SPLM's intentions in Juba, and accelerate preparations for the next phase of peace talks (it must be admitted frankly that the SPLM has made more progress, modest as it is, than the UN/AU in uniting the factions). Incorporating the Fur into the political process, however, still presents a serious challenge. Constrained by its own institutional dysfunction, the UN/AU is unlikely to overcome this obstacle (which would require a sophisticated UN/AU strategy involving Fur IDPs and prominent field commanders) without more consistent leadership. UN sources continue to indicate their agreement that a single UN mediator with support staff, leaving the JMST structure behind, is the best approach. However, they would need U.S. and international community's support for finding a graceful way for Eliasson and Salim to step aside during the mediation phase. End comment.
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